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as belonging to the houses. The relatively large number of cattle and the high ranking of the Nzunga clan accounted for the number of *lobola* marriages.

Family structure in individual and group life

As individuals and in family groups members of leading Ngoni clans claimed and exercised leadership in their villages. The leading families in the area of a *mulumuzana* owning a head village, and the small Ngoni family groups in a larger non-Ngoni setting, all expected and received 'honour' (*ulemu*). The tendency in the central kingdom to marry up, and in the northern kingdom to marry into the clan of the mother if it were a high-ranking one, emphasized the importance attached to the rank and prestige of certain clans. This attitude towards family prestige was more noticeable in the central kingdom where individuals were quick to announce who was their mother or wife if that information would enhance their reputation.

The leadership of high-ranking families was not only a matter of claiming prestige. It carried with it, on the male and the female side, responsibility for regulating the affairs of the village and the house and the *banja*. Quarrels had to be composed, if possible before they came to court, troubles over deserted wives looked into, provision made for hospitality and for keeping the village premises in order. Informants emphasized again and again that in Ngoni villages where many men and women were of Swazi clans, order and cleanliness were to be expected. This was not always the case, but it was strikingly illustrated in two of the villages referred to in this chapter—Endindeni in the northern and Mangozo in the central kingdom.

In day-to-day village affairs much mutual help was given by members of Ngoni families to each other, especially by the men to widowed mothers and sisters, and by the husband's brothers to wives whose husbands were away at work. The dislocation caused to the village economy by the emigration of males called for considerable organization on the part of those who were left. Ngoni male leaders of families and heads of a *banja*, and the women heads of the houses, all had to include the needs of these 'deserted' women in their own planning. In the northern kingdom, in spite of its relative poverty, better care was taken of wives whose husbands were away because the strong virilocal tradition emphasized this type of help.

In rearing and training children the Ngoni family structure and relationships provided direction and responsibility. We shall discuss in the next chapter on age sets the significance of birth and puberty ceremonies in Ngoni life. More significant, however, than any ceremony was the continuous provision for the training of children, adolescents and young adults in correct behaviour. This duty fell on the women as far as young children and girls were concerned, and on the men for the

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boys and young men, so long as they were in the village. Ngoni men insisted that their children should be correctly trained, and they were contemptuous of Cewa and other tribal groups who left it 'all to the women'. The handing on of correct behaviour by the mother-in-law to her daughter-in-law was, they considered, essential, and one of the reasons why young men in the central kingdom liked to 'marry up' was that they could count on the careful grounding in all the canons of behaviour which their wives had received.

CHAPTER V

AGE SETS

THE Ngoni brought with them to Nyasaland an age-set system akin to that among the South-eastern Bantu, which was an important element in their social structure. In pre-European days the division into cattle-herders or pre-warriors, warriors, and post-warriors or senior men, regulated the tasks and responsibilities of boys and men in other spheres besides those of warfare. At the beginning of this section, when reviewing age sets as one of the constituent forms of Ngoni social organization, I said that some features of an age-set system had persisted. In comparison with age-grouping in the other Nyasaland tribes it was distinctively Ngoni in form; it influenced behaviour patterns in inter-group and intra-group relations; and in it were recognized certain responsibilities and activities belonging to the different groups based on age.

Among the distinctively Ngoni elements in the age-set system were the private nature of the puberty ritual and the absence of initiation schools; the organization of boys' life in the *laweni*; the strong ties between age mates up to marriage; the selective principle in designating senior men and women as *madoda* and *manina*; and a different kind of selective principle in the formation of friendship pacts between individuals of the same age. In observing the role of age sets in Ngoni village society, the two main groups which were constantly in evidence as groups were the older boys and girls and the senior men and women. These groups not only carried out activities together, but also showed evidence of the strength of the internal ties linking members of an age set. There were, however, no sharp edges to these groups, either in terms of actual age or physiological development or of exclusive membership. The following list of terms applied to age sets in the two main Ngoni areas shows primarily the difference in designation between males and females according to broad age grouping, but it illustrates also the fact that the terminology applied to the age sets did not always coincide

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some for themselves as their perquisite. They then drove the cattle to pasture, and this might be some distance away when grass was scarce in the dry season. They sometimes drove the cattle back near the village to rest at noon under the shade trees, but if the pasture was far away the cattle rested there and went on feeding later. They were brought back to the kraal in the late afternoon and counted by one of the senior men.

The herd-boys taught each other to fight with sticks, to wrestle, to catch rats and small birds, to use the knobkerry, catapults, and bows and arrows. Sometimes in the afternoon they went to other villages and challenged another herd to a fight between bulls.[1] During the long day's herding, the boys used to drink milk, make *amasi* (milk curds) in a gourd and eat it, bake birds in clay and roast ears of maize taken from their mothers' grain stores. Precedence among the herd-boys depended first on age and only secondly on the rank and position of the families they belonged to. There was an easily recognizable air of authority and almost of arrogance among the older boys responsible for their fathers' and uncles' cattle. They superintended the process of letting out the cattle, milking them, driving them to pasture and the return to the kraal in the evening. Mounted on donkeys, wearing large straw hats made by themselves, the senior boys acted like ranch owners bossing up inefficient work hands.

This period of living in the *laweni* was, as we have seen, shared by boys of a wide age group. In a large village where there were two or three or four *laweni*, there was often one in each section, which generally meant that the boys belonging to one *banja* or section shared one *laweni*. This had the effect of dividing them up to some extent on a basis of family and rank, but in a *laweni* serving a whole village all the boys went in together whatever families they came from. There was no respecting of clan status in the *laweni* and young boys of high-ranking families had to wait on and obey older boys of lower rank. *Laweni* life was therefore a democratizing influence among the boys of the village, and no boys were excused from herding cattle because they belonged to a house which owned cattle. Even if some went to school and others did not, the school-boys had to take their share of herding in the holidays. Ngoni chiefs and leading men laid great emphasis on keeping the boys busy and making them carry out the work allotted to them. The older boys began to listen in at court cases and to discuss them among themselves. During the wet season from time to time they formed hoeing parties for clearing new ground and for the periodical weeding of gardens. They seldom did any continuous cultivation, as the women and the older men did, and a boy who liked to go off and hoe by himself was pointed out as one with rather peculiar tastes.

During this period of *laweni* life, when in addition to herding the

[1] For the relation between the training of herd-boys and preparation for war, see Part II, Chap. I, p. 30.

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boys took more interest and more part in adult occupations and affairs, the emergence of leadership among Ngoni boys of high-ranking families was watched by their elders and recognized by their age mates. This was the formative period when a boy's capacity to succeed his father in a position of authority was carefully observed and judged. The Ngoni had ways of passing over a man who was a physical weakling, a coward in face of danger, a sadistic bully to weaker men, a pursuer of women and a breaker-up of marriages. The *madoda* in a Ngoni village, who appeared to let the boys in the *laweni* manage their own affairs without interfering, had nevertheless a shrewd idea of who was making good and who was proving disappointing. Their comments, showing continued observation over a long period, were often expressed when two or three friends and age mates from the *laweni* decided to go off to the south to work together. The *madoda* would then say: 'We hope they will come back soon and not be "lost". So and so is like his father and he will help us here in the village'; or they might comment: 'Good riddance, they were always hanging round the girls—worthless ones, indeed' (*wa chabe ndithu*).

It has already been pointed out that there was no circumcision school nor public initiation rite among the Ngoni. At puberty the ritual observed was a private and personal affair. On a boy's first nocturnal emission his age mates informed an older boy in the *laweni*, who told him to go at once before it was light and bathe in the river, and to do so each morning after an emission. This use of cold water was believed to give a boy strength and virility. The boy was also instructed by the older boys in the *laweni* on how to behave to his equals and his elders and to women. This stage was called *uhuchayiwa nga' manzi*, 'to be beaten with water', and was not reported to the older people. When the older people noticed that the boy's voice was breaking, his father inquired whether he had passed puberty and, on being assured of this, he found a man who knew the *uludengele* medicine. The father killed a goat, and the medicine man took some of the unchewed cud from the goat's stomach, mixed it with the bitter *uludengele* root and put it on a pan over a fire. This took place near the gate of the kraal or near the parents' hut, with the father and the father's male relatives standing by. When the mixture boiled, the boy was told to dip the tips of his fingers in the pan one after the other and lick each one quickly. At the same time he kept jumping over the fire and striking his elbows against his sides. The Ngoni believed that this medicine gave boys physical strength and stamina and they administered it to their servants' sons as well. It was still practised in the 1930's among Ngoni who were educated and partly westernized.

While the organization of the *laweni* catered for all boys from their second teeth till their marriage, including boys from the age sets called *abantwana* and *amajaha*, the organization of girls' life followed a

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different pattern. They also went to sleep with a grandmother or some other older member of the family when they were old enough to be excluded from their mother's hut at night, and they shared with their small brothers the grandmother's care and her story-telling round the fire in the evenings. During the day the girls continued as part of their mother's household group, eating with her and the younger children. As little girls they were taught to sit down carefully and to smooth down the cloth which they wore round their waists. They were trained to speak correctly and to know the right forms of address, to greet strangers politely, to avoid touching their father's mats or bed, to eat tidily and with restraint. The emphasis was on exclusiveness for these high-born Ngoni girls, lest, as a result of mixing too freely with everyone, they should forget the teaching given and the behaviour which was expected of them. In contrast to their brothers' rigorous training in the *laweni*, Ngoni girls, as they showed signs of approaching puberty, were guarded and looked after and instructed further in correct behaviour.

When a girl found that she was menstruating for the first time, she told one of her age mates and sent her to tell her *gogo*.[1] The *gogo* told her to stay in the hut during the period and showed her how to wear a cloth between her legs, which she had henceforth to wear always whether menstruating or not. She was told to sleep from now on in a different part of the hut from the smaller children and never to bathe with younger girls. At the end of her first period the girl was escorted to the women's bathing-place by her father's sisters and other female members of her father's family. She was made to wash in the stream and squat in the cold water while doing so. I saw more than one child trying to control her shivering while her relatives watched to see if she would be strong and brave, or weak and cowardly. When she was in the water she was made to face south-east—the quarter which the Ngoni called *kwathu* (our home). After this ceremony the girl's father and mother were informed, and her father informed the head of his *banja* and the head of the village. The news was greeted with rejoicing and made generally public.

From about the age of ten or eleven, the Ngoni girl belonged to an age set distinguished by a separate name. She was no longer included in the group of children, as were her brothers of the same age, but was marked out by belonging to the age set called *inkakazana* or *mabuthu*. After her first menstruation she belonged to the age set called *izintombi* or *anamwali*. From this stage, Ngoni girls were under the close supervision of the older women. The association of a *gogo* or older woman with each house in a Ngoni village meant that the girls of the house were under her special care, particularly after they had passed puberty. There

[1] *gogo* in this context is used for grandmother or for the elderly woman to whose care the girl was assigned.

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were clearly defined aims in this care of girls after puberty, including instruction in personal hygiene and in pre-marital sexual relations. A girl's father's sisters and her own mother wanted to be able to say, when marriage negotiations began: *Ngombe zake zidzala*, 'her cattle are full', which was the comment made when girls were examined periodically to see if they were still virgin. To achieve this they constantly said to her: '*Mudzisunge, mudzilet:se*', 'take care of yourself, control yourself'; and the *gogo* explained to the girl how she could protect herself. In one area where I lived, the chief's daughter was examined every week, with her *izidandani* or companions, and the girls who helped in the big house were examined every month. The strict behaviour required of Ngoni girls of good family was expected also of those of the same age who were members of the same household, either appointed to be with them as companions or as servants in the big house.

Looking forward to marriage involved not only preservation of her virginity. An Ngoni girl going to a strange village had to know how to perform women's work in the home, how to do it herself as well as how to direct others, and she had to be carefully trained in that meticulous and exclusive social behaviour required of Ngoni women of good family. She might be going to marry a man who intended to 'marry up', in which case she might be thought in one sense to be 'marrying below her station'. Yet her personal position as a member of her father's clan and family could not be altered by her marriage, and she was well aware that she was conferring something on the man and on the family she married into.

While the boys were learning their roles in later life in the democratic atmosphere of the *laweni* and of the boys' pursuits in the village, the girls in the later stage of their training after puberty were treated more individually, and were not left to find their level in a group of their age mates. The adult women took an active part in telling them how to behave, how to dress and how to cook. The girls of high-ranking families sometimes pounded maize with their age mates, singing as they did so, but more for fun than because their food depended on it. They learned to dress their hair and put on clothes, and to walk and dance in company with other girls, but always with the critical eye of their *gogo* upon them. Their lower-ranking companions could make mistakes and be careless, and walk and dance in an exaggerated fashion. Ngoni girls might never pass certain bounds of decorum, and the standard expected of them was high and exacting. I have heard *manina* of leading clans scold young girls many times for careless behaviour and badly done work.

In this training, as throughout that of the boys, there was a deliberate preparation for leadership. A girl's character and ability were being watched and, while an awareness of her personal dignity and position was being fostered, it was accompanied by requirements of obedience

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and docility, especially to older women. This last was intended to stand her in good stead when she went to be married in a strange village and would be expected to show subservience to her mother-in-law. At the same time, since the girl belonged to a high-ranking clan, she knew, and so did those who were training her, that she would eventually have to exercise authority and teach others what to do and show them how to do it. She would also be expected to have a mind of her own and to speak out on occasions to her husband and, when she grew older, to rebuke women in her house or in her service if they did anything amiss.

In pre-European days, between the private puberty ritual and her marriage, the Ngoni girl went through another ceremony, the *umsindo*. This was a pre-marriage rite, and was in many instances followed almost immediately by marriage. It was held for girls of high-ranking families, though their companions from their own and other villages shared in the ritual. The ceremony was abandoned after the missionaries came, but many of the songs and the dances were well-known to the leading Ngoni women. I saw many *umsindo* dances in the northern and central kingdoms and collected a number of the songs which were still in use, some sung to solo instruments, such as the *igubu*, and others sung at funerals or at tribal gatherings. Those *umsindo* songs which referred to sexual intercourse and used expressions which were considered obscene, had been sung only at the ceremony itself. The Ngoni made a practice of referring to genital organs and to sexual intercourse in veiled language. As soon as the meaning of the terms became obvious, they were disguised by other allusive terms. The degree of obscenity in the actual words of songs was therefore very difficult to establish, but Ngoni informants were always clear about which could be sung in public and which only on occasions of licence or strictly in private.

The *umsindo* ceremony as a preliminary to marriage fulfilled certain functions. It was a public declaration that the girl for whom it was held had been examined and found to be a virgin, for it was not held for anyone who had been deflowered in earlier love affairs. It emphasized the social rank and the wealth of the girl's father, for only rich and important men could afford to hold *umsindo* for their daughters. It had a strong element of a *rite de passage* in it, for the girls were secluded in a hut during most of the ceremony, they fasted, they were given instruction by older women, and they were finally 'brought out' of the hut and adorned with parts of the beasts slaughtered, and with beads given as presents by friends and relatives. Perhaps the chief significance of the *umsindo* was the fact that it was a ceremony held for the girl in her father's village. It was an assertion of her membership in her own family and village circle, and of her father's status and of his regard for her. There is no doubt that the Ngoni women of high rank had a keen sense of their own importance and position; the *umsindo* ceremony

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of this book, especially Chapters IV and V will show how the organization of Ngoni society and the cultural way of living in it, necessarily surrounded the life of children and the training given to them with a much wider horizon. We shall talk about the family, the household, the village as the setting of Ngoni child life, but these terms have to be interpreted according to the Ngoni social organization, sketched very briefly in Chapter I and set out at length in my earlier book *The Ngoni of Nyasaland*. Looked at from another angle, we can see that a young child's horizon in Ngoni villages was limited at first to what he saw around him and the people who had daily or frequent contact with him and who understood and supplied his daily needs. But that circle of people forming a young child's contacts was from the beginning much wider than the individual family which a child was born into. When he began to run about and to pass beyond the restricted confines of the household, it was as we shall see, the duty and responsibility of all Ngoni adults to notice his behaviour and correct him when necessary.

The relationships inside the large Ngoni families, between one family and another in a Ngoni village, with related families in other villages, with all members of the same clan living in an area—these were threads in the web of kinship and clanship which united the Ngoni people. These threads were also inseparable from the political links between the people and their territorial chief, and between the whole people and the Paramount, the head of the kingdom. The difference, however, between the Ngoni kingdom under the Paramount which included all his subjects of Ngoni and non-Ngoni ethnic groups, and the Ngoni aristocracy in the villages was a profound difference. It was the latter who understood, appreciated and sought to hand on to their children Ngoni ways of living based on Ngoni values. Hence in most villages there were sharp distinctions between standards of behaviour within Ngoni families and in non-Ngoni families.

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194 563 families. It was, however, demanded from Ngoni children that they should behave in the socially approved manner to [867] everyone, and not only to their Ngoni kin and fellow clansmen. And it was evident in non-Ngoni families that there was often some attempt to teach Ngoni standards of behaviour to their children, but that such attempts broke down when their family system was not organized to enforce the necessary training.

576 577 [867] *The goals of Ngoni child training*

Ngoni adults, and especially the senior men and women who were in control of the training of children and themselves deeply conscious of the traditional values of their society, summed up the aims of the upbringing of children in one word 'respect'. The vernacular term *ulemu*—in the old Ngoni language *klonipa*—is a concept very difficult to translate adequately, certainly to convey its full meaning in a single English word or phrase. The nearest terms are honour and respect, and though in some contexts it is often translated as politeness, that is too limited a term. In fact they had another vernacular term to express courtesy which was to them one way of showing respect. The concept of *ulemu* included the recognition that a particular person or office was entitled to honour; that all behaviour to that person must express respect; and that by showing respect in language, posture and action, a child or adult so behaving, shared in that honour which they were acknowledging. Conversely, through failing to convey respect, a person, whether child [559] or adult, was 'ashamed' and lost face accordingly. I have just said that a particular person was entitled to honour and therefore to respect in the behaviour of others. The Ngoni said that was the origin of the concept, and it was demonstrated in the punctilious observance of etiquette to all chiefs, and to all leading men and women by everyone else. [858] But there was an extension of this concept to include all older people, and Ngoni children were expected to show

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respect to all adults, whether Ngoni or not, whether of their family, or helpers in the household, or former captives. If children did not so behave to old and poor people, they were punished and made to feel ashamed as if they had failed to honour their own relatives.

A Ngoni elder when speaking of the testimony of early travellers in Ngoniland to the good manners found in Ngoni households said: 'Such honouring of each other came to the Ngoni because they liked living together without any scattering as was the custom of other Nyasaland people. . . . . Such honour was not shown by young people for fear of being beaten, but because all children were well taught that this behaviour was right and proper for the upbuilding of the land.'

The emphasis in this quotation is clearly on the connexion between personal behaviour and the integrity and prosperity of the Ngoni kingdom. When Ngoni elders were talking about child training and its effect on the future of the Ngoni people, they made constant reference to 'those who spoil the land'. The phrase was the same as taking the roof off a hut, i.e. destroying it for the purpose for which it was built. This determined emphasis on behaviour illustrated the Ngoni intention of regulating personal contacts within their society, so that harmonious relations would build up the society which quarrels and factions would destroy, and indeed had partly destroyed in some of the historic secessions from the kingdom. Harmonious personal relations are perhaps the covert if not the overt aim of all human societies from the individual family outwards. We see this however in sharp outline in Ngoni life, partly because they were acutely aware of the vulnerability from external influences of their society and way of living.

Two very ancient folk-tales illustrate Ngoni thinking about keeping their kingdom and society intact and maintaining their code of polite behaviour.

The first was taken down by me from a very old man who

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539 867 The moral, which was always repeated at the end as part of the story, was that children were warned not to show unkindness to people but to treat them well so that people would bless them. They were reminded that the older sister showed the qualities of pity, courage and obedience, while the younger sister did not hesitate to display disgust and fear and carelessness. It was the older sister who had her ultimate reward as leading wife of a handsome chief, while the younger sister, as a subsidiary wife, had to take second place.

These two folk-tales were popular among the children, even though they were so different from the animal folk-tales, full of humour and absurdities. The children used to shiver with excitement over the Brass-Rod story, especially the little girls, and the boys sucked in their breath when the wind blew and snapped their fingers for the rattling in the pit. Because the stories were serious and had a didactic purpose, Ngoni fathers approved of them, and encouraged the grandmothers to tell them often in order that the children might remember the moral.

Learning how to behave

203 857 [202] Ngoni villages, like the whole Ngoni kingdom, had an efficient system of communication between individuals and groups, but whereas the kingdom had a network of official messengers continually moving between the capital and the outlying sections, the village 'intercom' depended on the children. At any time of day, from first light till after dark, children were moving about the village from one hut to another, from a hut to the kraal gate, taking messages, summoning people, carrying food, reporting arrivals. The messages and summons were all at the bidding of the adults.

576 857 867 202 When a child was called to take a message, he had to respond immediately wherever he was, and run to hear what he was wanted for. Someone calling a child's name, followed by a long drawn out 'Yo—o—o', punctuated all the hours of daylight in a village. When a child was told to call someone

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older, on reaching them he had to bend one knee, or sit down, and say in a low but clear voice: 'They are calling you.' If a child was sent to call another child to his father because he had a scolding to administer, the bad child had to listen with head bent down, not saying a word or making a sound until the father had finished all he had to say, whether the accusation was just or not. If the child forgot himself and answered back or made excuses, the onlookers would beat the child for being rude to his father. If when taking a message a child had to pass a line or a group of people, he had always to go in front of them, never behind, bending forward from the waist and murmuring as he went by, 'I am before your eyes.' If a child had to give an adult a food basket or any other object, he had to offer it with both hands and bend slightly over it; and when he received it back he always did so with both hands outstretched and bent head.

Acting as messengers constantly, and no child was immune from being called if he or she was in the village, impressed on children from their early years the chief behavioural skills of language and deportment. Taking a message was always a formal occasion, and standards of behaviour in language, posture and gesture were rigidly enforced. We shall see in later chapters how very small children were first taught to thank people for gifts or in response to a greeting, and later to greet people politely themselves. The correct terms in which to address or to refer to relatives formed another stage in learning language skills, and later on came reminders about the use of pronouns and the use of the second person singular and plural of verbs, the first to equals only, the second to all adults, with the third person plural for chiefs and 'great ones'. About the age of five or six a child was told: 'When your mother speaks to a stranger she says "Please (you) sit here". You should speak like this to all people you must honour. Only rude people speak that other way—people who do not know how to thank and how to honour, not like the Ngoni who know these things.'

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867 Correction of bad behaviour, even if thoughtless or careless, was just as often carried out by older children as by
[123] adults. I used to hold a 'children's hour' now and then round the fire in my compound, or a honey party if I had been given some wild honey. These occasions were open to all and were enthusiastically organized by the older children of leading Ngoni families. They pushed the children into some sort of order, whether sitting or standing, or marching round the honey-pot to stick one finger in and lick it as they passed. When we were sitting round the fire there was always due regard for family ranking, the places immediately on my right and left being the places of honour. Children of non-Ngoni families were sharply rebuked if they failed to respond to my greeting or say farewell, and shyness was never admitted as an excuse. Scathing remarks were dealt out to any who did not say the correct formal thanks for the honey. 'You, fellow-villager, you are with the Ngoni now. Say "thank you" to the lady or she will think you are a wild animal from the bush, unable to speak.' Bad behaviour was not only corrected
867 by adults with beating and rebukes. Sometimes the more
538 indirect form of a proverb was used, especially to correct unkindness, lack of generosity, boasting or bragging. When someone said with biting emphasis: 'Strength breaks the handle,' it was enough to deflate a young (or an old) braggart. When children plagued their elders to give them something, they rounded on the children with: 'Give! Give! that is to snatch. The child of a free man only gives.' This was invariably effective with Ngoni children who hung their heads in shame at the very idea of being thought the child of a captive. Proverbs, except ones like those quoted which were very often used, were generally enigmatic, and the meaning was hidden rather than obvious. In a mixed gathering of children and adults, a proverb might suddenly be dropped like a stone into a pond. The conversation rippled away into silence, and the boy or girl who had refused to share some peanuts or had been boasting began to wonder

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to himself: 'Can that be for me? No? Yes? It *is* me. I am ashamed.' No one said anything but the shamed one took the first chance of slipping away to avoid further public notice. The use of proverbs in this way were an effective way of making a child learn for himself and apply the lesson; and with children, as with adults, the use of proverbs was a way of 'saving face' when a direct rebuke in the presence of others would have caused overwhelming shame.

Ngoni ideas about nature and nurture

This fixed code of social behaviour between persons was instilled by Ngoni adults into their children from their early years. By the time they had their second teeth, a significant stage to the Ngoni, they were expected to conduct themselves towards other people according to this code. Their behaviour, in public at any rate, should be predictable, if those responsible for the teaching of 'respect' had carried out their task conscientiously. But, as the Ngoni themselves recognized, it was one thing to have a system of training with a desired goal in view. It was another thing to see how each individual child responded to the training, and either conformed to the code or resisted it. The Ngoni thought that the clue to conformity or resistance lay in the individual's character, and they talked a great deal about the character of their children. Such conversations generally arose when adults were watching a group of boys and girls carrying out a socially required or self-appointed task. They might be bringing back the cattle in the evening, practising for the *ngoma* dance, grinding bulrush millet for snacks for the little children, asking each other riddles or telling a story. Some of the tasks called for intelligence, some for physical strength, some for initiative or organizing ability, some for eloquence.

Character, so the Ngoni thought, came from two sources, inborn qualities and acquired qualities. The first they called *mabadidwe*, literally those things which an individual was born with. These included physical resemblances to their

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828 827 parents, such as colour of skin, shape of face and features, posture and carriage, speaking voice; and the less tangible qualities such as control of temper, power to command others, eloquence in speech, as well as anti-social characteristics such as cruelty, rages, meanness, jealousy. Both kinds of inborn qualities, physical and moral, could come from either parent. In the case of the average child, who was not outstanding in any way, few comments if any were made on his heredity. But if a child showed outstanding ability or powers of leadership, or was on the contrary always quarrelling or showing off or sulking, they looked for an explanation of such qualities in his parentage.

828 867 Yet heredity was not in Ngoni thinking the only explanation for a child's character. Nor did they believe that it always followed that a cruel father had vicious sons, nor a mother who was tactful and pacific, daughters showing the same traits. They thought character, though partly inherited, was modified by and moulded by acquired qualities due to training. In the case of bad inherited qualities they could be, it was hoped, corrected by persistent training. When desirable qualities were shown by either or both parents it was always hoped that the child would also show them, and that good upbringing would ensure their development. They were always puzzled when sons of outstanding men and daughters of distinguished women turned out badly.

The acquired qualities were known as *makhalidwe*, the root of which was *kukhala*. This was a word used in a great many contexts with different meanings in each. In the context of child training it was used to mean to behave, with the added implication that it was what a person was like, due to his behaviour. *Makhalidwe* was used therefore, in the sense of conduct, implying behaviour in all relationships and including what had been acquired through response to training.

As we shall see later, Ngoni elders were afraid to leave a child, especially a girl after the age of seven or so, in her

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mother's household if the mother showed obvious signs of being a 'bad character'. They might take the child away and put her with some relative of acknowledged 'good character', in the hope of offsetting the effects of heredity by careful training.

In later childhood and especially on the threshold of adulthood, as we shall see in Chapters VI and VII, boys and girls were expected to learn and practise traditional Ngoni skills and to be conversant with traditional Ngoni knowledge. Skills and knowledge, or rather the ability to use them, might be inherited from a parent, but they were generally regarded as acquired qualities. In any case, they needed careful training and direction in order that they might be fully developed.

Ngoni cultural values

After the Scottish Mission had been in North Nyasaland for some time, and the Bible and other Christan literature had been translated into the vernacular, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* became one of the most popular and widely read books in Ngoniland, both by older children and by adults. The reason was that its imagery portrayed so many ideas and situations which the Ngoni recognized as being relevant for them in the new world to which they had to adapt themselves. It became for Ngoni Christians, and for many others too since it was told far more often than it was read, a new kind of folk-tale, and was told as such to children in school and in the villages. The themes of striving towards a goal, and fighting lions and giants on the way, and listening to good advice as well as hearing bad—these and other themes were recognized as in the Ngoni tradition although in such a different setting.

In the final chapter of this book we shall talk about personality and character among the Ngoni, looking at the ideas of basic personality as set out by Linton and others, and trying to see how training at different stages of childhood had been converging towards the ideal personality of the Ngoni

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women helpers of his mother's age, one or two of whom had come with her at her marriage to attend her, and who themselves had married in her new village. Above them again were the older women helpers of his grandmother's generation, themselves grandmothers, whom he addressed as 'grandmother', as he did his own grandparents.

There were other sets of people whom the young child saw less often. When he visited his mother's relatives in her old home, he enjoyed all the allurement a child feels for living in a different place among people who want to gratify his every wish. Sometimes the maternal relatives visited the child's home, but then their relationship with him was on more formal terms. They did not dare for example to give him titbits in private, or to pet him, or even to correct him, lest his father's relatives might notice and remind them: 'This is *our* child.'

Other strangers came and went all the time, and the child learned to distinguish between the village inhabitants and those he, and others, designated as 'strangers'. He saw mostly the women who were entertained in the compound of his grandmother. He was sometimes taken by his mother when she went to greet strangers by the big house, and he learned early that he was not expected to make a noise or call attention to himself in the presence of these strangers.

In this women's world the higher age-group in each status group, that is of relatives and helpers, carried the chief authority, gave orders, and rebuked all below them for breaches of etiquette or failure to carry out commands. For the small child, the whole superstructure of authority in the women's world built round his daily life a sense of security, partly because it was so ordered and so little variable. When the Ngoni said, 'A child belongs to all the village. They can all cherish him and correct him,' they really meant this women's world, organized through the households and the families and the houses. The child's needs for food and sleep, washing and warmth, care when sick, were taken care of

sieves for straining beer or water poured through ashes to make salt. These lay around all day if they were being used, and were periodically scrubbed and put on the rack to dry, and at night stacked tidily in the veranda. In the day-time sleeping-mats of finely woven fibre were brought out into the sun, and so were skins and cloths used as coverings at night. Some of the Ngoni used curved wooden headrests as pillows often carved at the ends with animals' heads to fascinate a small child.

On the polished space in front of the hut were laid from time to time mats on which sprouting millet for making beer was dried, or partly pounded damp maize. A young child was sometimes told to keep the fowls and dogs off these mats. These animals and often small kids, wandered and pecked and scratched and quarrelled inside the fence all day, and young children chased them.

Beyond the fence lay other fenced compounds grouped round the cattle kraal, and beyond the village buildings lay patches of woodland, grass pastures, cultivated 'gardens', and water-holes and streams. Going with the mother or grandmother or a nurse girl or helper to fetch water, or work in the gardens was an expedition for young children which they delighted in.

In these village surroundings there were some places forbidden to young children, who were corrected by everyone with smacks and stern reproofs until they learned to keep away. One such forbidden place was the kraal gateway where the men sat and talked and ate. No woman until she had passed the menopause was allowed to cross over in front of the gateway lest she injure the cattle. If therefore children strayed down there, younger women did not like to go and fetch them back, as the men always grumbled if women went there lest they should harm the cattle. It was nevertheless a place that had a great attraction for boys of five to seven years old, because they found their fathers there and the herd boys. The boys in this age-group of five to seven showed

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858 867 signs of irritation at female control, especially with this prohibition on going to the kraal gate. They escaped surveillance and ran off there now and then, only to be caught by one of the men, beaten and brought back to the compound with the remark: 'This child is not yet a herd boy. Keep him with you.'

If the village was near a roadway with traffic on it, or near a river, children were forbidden to go there without some older person with them. They were also warned not to go near fireplaces in case a burning log fell out, and to keep away from the woodpile where there might be snakes.

Training in habits

855 In these surroundings, diversified, orderly, and on the whole safe if forbidden places were avoided, young children's needs were attended to and they were gradually trained to look after themselves. For food, health and sleep, their primary physical needs, they had their older sisters, nurse girls, mothers, grandmothers and helpers all at hand to ensure that these needs were satisfied.

264 862 After the post-weaning months were over, and generally though not always after the next baby was born, a young child went back to eat with his mother in her compound and sleep in her hut, though a grandmother, if she had taken a special fancy to a child, might say she was going to keep him to eat and sleep with her. In his mother's compound twice a day the child watched her and her helpers preparing and cooking a meal. In due time he was called to the veranda where the food lay smoking, his hands were wiped, he was made to rinse out his mouth, and he sat down beside his mother or his nurse in a circle round the food basket. This contained the mash of cooked grain, usually maize, and beside it were the little pots of cooked 'relish', beans, peas, [262] green vegetables, tomatoes, ground-nuts. At first someone pinched up a little lump of the mash, dipped it in a relish, and popped it into his mouth, telling him to shut his mouth and chew before he swallowed. Later he learned to do this

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863 of dust, and many of them began to suffer from sores, itch and sore eyes. The girls however, had already begun to like a clean and shining skin for the sake of being beautiful, and their ablutions were no longer under duress.

The smallest children urinated and defecated wherever they happened to be. From the age of three or four, however, they were taught to tell someone if they wanted to defecate, and taken outside the hut. Maize cobs or soft leaves or grass were used to clean the child, and then thrown on the fire. When the child began to look after himself, he was shown how to use the left hand only when cleaning himself, [826] and told it was 'the hand of shame, only used for bad things'. From the age of four or five small girls and boys went with [514] their mothers and the other women to the section of the surrounding bush reserved for the women's toilet. At about the same age boys and girls were taught to withdraw from the public gaze when urinating, and to conceal themselves behind a hut or in some other hiding-place. The Ngoni were [514] [834] extremely prudish about all physical acts connected with evacuating or sex, and began to demand correct behaviour from children at an early age.

757 603 If a child was constipated, or had diarrhoea, or was vomiting, or had a fever or stomach-ache, the nurse girl reported it to his mother who went to tell the child's paternal grandmother. For all the range of usual childish ailments the grandmother prescribed and carried out standard treatments, such as whey used as a purgative, or very thin gruel to check diarrhoea. The Ngoni women had a number of herbal remedies which they used for themselves and their children. They also used hot poultices, cupping, and forms of massage. Only when the known household remedies failed, did the grandmother tell the child's father and he, as we have seen, took the responsibility for calling in 'specialists'.

867 864 Sleep, the little child's third major need, was sometimes well ordered and sometimes erratic. It was not considered proper for children to sleep in the same hut as their parents

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after the age of four or five, when they might become aware that intercourse was taking place. From this age, when the Ngoni said 'they will now begin to see things and to ask questions', they went to sleep either with a widowed grandmother or senior helper.

During the 'dark half of the month' and in the rains, most people went to bed soon after dark and little children got a long sleep. When the moon was bright, and in dry weather, the whole village was astir, walking around, dancing, talking, visiting. Little children tagged round with their older sisters or nurse girls, and if they were sleepy were either picked up and carried, or put in the hut to sleep on their mat, provided there was no fire burning into which they could fall. During the day, especially in the hot weather, children dropped off to sleep just where they were, on the veranda, under the platform, or in some other shady spot.

It was just before bedtime, in the grandmother's hut, that traditional folk-tales were told, round the last flickers of a wood fire. Sometimes a child dropped off to sleep before the story was finished. Someone either took him on her lap, or dumped him on his mat and covered him up.

This acquiring of habits, directed consciously by adults, was designed to give the child increasingly a sense of being part of a community which had certain standards of behaviour. There were, in this training, some prohibitions which a child was expected to observe as soon as he could walk and talk. The most stringent was on any form of sex play between boys and girls. To avoid any likelihood of this, little boys and girls were early encouraged to form separate play groups. The elders kept an eye particularly on the boys, and if they showed any inquisitiveness in their play about the private parts of a girl playmate, they were beaten and reproved and told: 'If you do this again, I shall tell your father.'

Many little boys and girls up to the age of four or five ran about naked, but in leading Ngoni families they wore a scrap

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of cloth hanging in front from a bead or grass waistband. They were all taught before that age, and most stringently after it, to sit correctly. For the little girls, this meant kneeling first and then sitting with the legs tucked on one side. They always smoothed down their scrap of cloth so that their genitals were covered. Little boys often squatted, sitting on their heels. Their correct position however, especially when eating food, was to sit with their legs crossed and the soles of their feet pressed against their thighs, and their cloth or skin apron arranged to cover their genitals.

Any rudeness in speech or action towards parents or elders was corrected at once, and the child was told: 'That is not the Ngoni way.' Studied courtesy included looking down when addressed by an elder, and as we saw in Chapter II, never walking behind a group of elders but passing in front of them, bending slightly forward and murmuring: 'I am before your eyes.'

Play places and playthings

In spite of what appeared like a somewhat restrictive régime, Ngoni children were merry and busy all their waking hours. Occasionally lack of health, or an awkward temperament, produced a child who sat around by himself, or glowered at other children, or was spiteful and vindictive. For the most part their nurse girls and older sisters paid them the attention they demanded, were always ready to provide distractions and amusements, and showed them how to use all that lay around them as playthings.

The places where they played depended on their age and mobility. The youngest children stayed round the hut and inside the fence. Occasionally the nurse girls and older sisters in the afternoons took them to a 'playground' on the outskirts of the village, where the older girls were accustomed to meet and practise dancing, or to thread beads and chatter. When the harvest was in, some of the older children about five and six years old, helped by the nurse girls, made 'play

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of this age, escaping from the women, showed their independence in their choice of games and occupations, many of which, as we have seen, were of an individual nature. They were not much inclined to join together as an age-group except for occasional gang enterprises. If one boy interfered with another's game of tops or took away his axe or hoop, there was an immediate short sharp fight. The defeated one either ran home to be comforted, with the jeers of the victor in his ears, or he stood and sulked for a moment, and then went on with his pursuit. It was outside in the open village spaces and not behind the fences of the compounds that small boys learned to put up with each other, to meet aggression and to be aggresive in turn, and then suddenly to gang up with a group and play happily together.

The test for boys of correct Ngoni training in the childhood stage, between weaning and second teeth, was their ability to get on with their age-mates and fellow villagers when they went to live in the dormitory. One boy went to live for long periods with his maternal grandmother in his mother's home village, after an argument in which for once his father was overruled by his wife and her family. This boy was indulged and spoiled by his maternal relatives who were afraid to correct him and to discipline him because he was the child of their son-in-law. The result was that when the boy came back about the age of seven, on his father's insisting that he should take part in herding and live in the dormitory, he was selfish, rude and disobedient, and failed to fit in with the other boys. This and similar stories were often quoted to show the importance of the father's family being in sole control during the early stages of childhood.

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then meant running out of the compound to the freedom of the village. At that time young children might behave outrageously and be punished for it, but they were not held accountable. The nurse girls and the mother, or some other adult, was blamed for letting the child grow up with such an uncontrolled temper or appetite or tongue. Once children were recognized as having passed the young child stage, that is when they had their second teeth, they themselves were held accountable for their behaviour and punished more severely, even though parents were also blamed for careless upbringing. The social sanctions of rebuke and ridicule, which began to operate in the later years of young childhood to only a limited extent, were now seen in their full force, made use of by adults, and still more effectively by the children's own age-mates. The fear of estrangement, of social ostracism as the penalty for failing to conform to the required manners and ways of living, had increasing force as the children grew older. As little children they were buttressed and protected by adults in their childish quarrels with, and moods and attitudes towards, other children. As boys in the dormitory and as girls in the girls' circle they had no longer such protection, and the result was that they became increasingly sensitive to the opinion of their peers. Professor Wilson in her study of Nyakusa age-villages, has called this social awareness the quality known as 'being good company'—getting on well with their contemporaries.

It was at this stage, at the beginning of the children's newly-found independence, that the ear-piercing ceremony took place. In contrast with the neighbouring peoples, the Ngoni had no facial or body markings, and it was the pierced ears which showed they were true Ngoni. In the days of warfare, captives, especially boys and men, were forcibly made to have their ears pierced, and hence a number of men in the Ngoni kingdoms who were not of Ngoni clans were found with pierced ears. Sometimes their children went to their parents and said, 'We want to be made Ngoni now.'

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575 there. It was a rough Spartan existence, where individual feelings and preferences had little scope, and where the younger ones were kept busy from dawn to dusk. Ngoni elders believed and indeed it was a key concept in their [858] culture, that boys should be kept busy all the time and made [515] to wash in cold water. Bathing in the cold streams of the Ngoni highlands was part of dormitory life. No Edwardian father talked more piously and convincingly about the merits of cold baths than Ngoni parents did.

575 The boys living in the dormitory continued to be fed from 264 their mother's household. The older boys had their food brought by a child to the kraal gate as was done for their fathers. The younger ones sometimes fetched their own and took it to the kraal gate where they sat on the extreme edge of the men's group. More often they were given what was left over from their fathers' and older brothers' servings. [146] This procedure accounted for the inadequate amounts eaten [272] by the younger boys, though they drank some milk when [262] milking the herds and out at the grazing grounds they made curds and caught birds and baked them in clay. Sometimes the desperation of hunger drove them to steal maize cobs or ground nuts from their mother's granary to roast in the [685] ashes of their fire. This kind of stealing was condemned as very wrong by Ngoni standards, and sometimes older boys, in order to show their authority, forced the young ones to steal in this way on their behalf.

575 What effect did dormitory life produce on the boys? The Ngoni parents, the fathers that is, expected it to produce [867] toughness, leadership, responsibility and respect for author- [155] rity. On the whole it was successful. The Spartan life ensured toughness, the herding of cattle demanded responsibility and leadership, and the smooth running of dormitory society was based on respect for authority and obedience to it. From time to time the younger boys ganged up together to protect themselves from over-exploitation, and learned in these efforts at resistance the value of joint action. There was con-

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men's affairs. The kind of topics discussed by men at the kraal gate included hunting, in the right season; cases heard in the courts and the application of Ngoni law to all subjects of the Ngoni chiefs; the organization of village affairs from tax collecting and dealing with tax evaders to beer drinks and burials and building houses; the sales of cotton, tobacco and cattle at near-by markets and the current prices; the various labour recruiters combing the villages for likely young men and the latest stories brought back by men who had returned from working in the south. Every now and then, particularly when the talk ranged round decisions in the courts or adding to the herds of cattle, references were made to the Ngoni past, to their relations with Europeans, both missionaries and officials, and to the behaviour of the non-Ngoni groups in the Ngoni kingdoms. The older boys listened attentively and as we shall see later in Chapter VII acquired among other things an extensive knowledge about the needs and uses of cattle. The younger ones pricked up their ears now and then when a familiar name or event was mentioned, and stored up questions to ask their father at a time when he was willing to listen and answer.

There was the usual Ngoni formality about where people sat at the kraal gate. The most senior men sat on each side of the opening, leaning up against the gate-posts, with the rest in decreasing order of rank as they were farther from the gate. The cleared space on each side of the gate and in front of it was all known as the 'gate of the kraal'. The craftsmen who were carving wood or twisting bark rope, making baskets or plaiting mats, sat according to their age and rank on the edges of the senior group or among them. They could have carried on their trade anywhere, but they preferred the company of their fellows and did not want to miss listening to the talk or the arrival of strangers. The herd-boys, when they were present, were on the extreme edges of those sitting there, divided into two groups, 'youths' and boys. Each group made its own fire for boiling milk and roasting sweet potatoes or ground-nuts.96

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to establish their hold. The Ngoni elders said the missions did not like it, and alleged that they gave it up for this reason. But they held on to other rituals also not approved by the missions, and it was probably largely due to the fact that there were no longer large herds of cattle to provide lavish feasts. The songs were remembered and sung by the older women when dancing the special dances associated with the ritual, holding in their hands short rods and small rounded shields, and making stiff jerking movements of head and elbows. Such dances as were put on for me were however a relic and not a living tradition. For the Ngoni girl of good family there was no longer any intervening ritual between her private puberty ceremony and the marriage ceremony.

The marriage age of girls, like that of men, was much earlier than formerly, the most usual age being from sixteen upwards. Most of the older women held that this left very little time in which to teach girls all that they were expected to know before being married and leaving their own home and their father's village for good. This was a particular cause of anxiety to the senior women in areas where the young men emigrated soon after marriage, and where the girl had to maintain her own position and reputation among his relatives without his companionship and support.

Young adults in Ngoni society

We have just seen that cultural changes coming from the outside radically altered the traditional pattern of development of Ngoni youths and girls. The net result of these changes was to telescope the period between physical maturity at puberty and full adult status at marriage, to squeeze the former eight to ten years of this intervening period into about two for the girls and four at most for the youths. This shortened period of preparation for full adult life raised a number of problems for the Ngoni elders. They were aware, as was suggested in the beginning of this chapter, that the attainment of physical maturity called for some re-alignment

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of the emphases in training boys and girls. This was especially the case in the regulation of relations between the sexes, but new emphases were also needed in the knowledge and competence of young adults before setting up their own households. Boys and girls from this stage onwards were in fact in Ngoni culture thought of as young adults. They had passed out of childhood through the physical change at puberty, and though for a year or two that made little difference in their way of living, they were now regarded as in training for what lay ahead of them. For that training the senior members of their father's family still felt responsible and exercised control. But the emphasis in the training given was on what adults should know, how adults should behave, what adults should be able to do. For the rest of this chapter we shall follow up the new emphases in guiding and to some extent controlling relations between the sexes, and in the following chapter the emphases on cultural knowledge and on technical skills.

In the all-important sphere of heterosexual relations, there were certain social controls among the Ngoni which operated in the selection of a mate and in the form of courtship leading to marriage. Prohibited sex relations and prohibited marriages set up a pattern of avoidance between brothers and sisters, between parallel cousins, and between members of the same clan, and in former days the prohibition had extended also to the children of men of the same regiment. In selecting a mate the Ngoni preference was for someone in another village, for someone of an equal ranking or higher clan, and among Christian families for a young man or girl either already baptized or under instruction. This last preference, urged strongly by the missions and by Christian parents, was often difficult to reconcile with the preference for a high-ranking clan connexion. This was illustrated in the case of a young teacher, whose parents were Christians. He found himself being given contrary advice about choosing a wife. His father died, and his grandfather, an ex-

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VII

The Threshold of Adulthood (ii)

Knowledge and skills

867 868 Towards the end of the last chapter we said that in this following chapter we would be concerned with the knowledge and skills which young adults in Ngoni society needed before they could assume the adult role of setting up and managing a new home, and of taking part in village and national affairs. Here and there in earlier chapters there have been references to 'men's affairs' and the 'world of women', suggesting that there was a range of knowledge, of activities and of competence in those activities for which preparation and training was needed for those on the threshold of adulthood.

In talking with the Ngoni about the way in which they were handing on their traditional knowledge to the younger generations, they often distinguished between two kinds of knowledge: one a wide range of perceptions and information necessary to carry out daily and occasional activities in the household and village; and the other, a corpus of traditional lore about natural phenomena, and about their history and law. This is not altogether a valid distinction since both kinds of knowledge were traditional but it is a convenient way of approaching the two kinds of instruction given to young adults. The Ngoni were often apt to stress the importance of this second kind of knowledge because they resented the attitude of many Europeans that the Ngoni, and other African peoples, were 'ignorant' until the schools came. This touched them on a very sore point since they set great store on knowledge and wisdom in men and women, and did

867 [186] [577]

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not understand how Europeans could draw such a sharp line and equate ignorance with the absence of a literature and written traditions. When talking about how they instructed their young people in the traditional knowledge about the natural world and their own national law and history, they pointed out that there were no set periods for this kind of teaching, but that there was a recognition that the young man, before or about the time when he himself became a father, should know what his father knew. We will begin then with some indication of the kind of matters included in this traditional store of knowledge, recognizing that reference can be made only to a small selection from it. We will go on in the second half of the chapter to the other kind of knowledge which was inseparably connected with practical and technical skills.

867 ● [212] 128

Ngoni traditional knowledge: the reckoning of time

The Ngoni had a system of reckoning time and a recognized calendar. This consisted of thirteen lunar months in the year, reckoned from the first appearance of each new moon, and beginning with our December as the first month. The names of the months are all related to natural events, and these as the following list shows were in five main groups: when certain wild animals had their young; the time of bitter cold and frosts; when the hawks came to catch chickens; when certain trees fruited; when the new crops were ripe and the former first fruit ceremony took place.

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NGONI NAMES FOR MONTHS

1	*Impala*	Antelopes have their young
2	*Inkokoni*	Gnu have their young
3	*Impuso*	Tasting new crops
4	*Inyati*	Buffaloes have their young
5	*Indlovu*	Elephants have their young
6	*Ilize elincinyane*	Beginning of cold weather
7	*Ilize elikulu*	Great cold weather

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in judgement on his own son, a young man of twenty-one, for committing adultery with the wife of a man of a former slave family. The husband brought the case against the chief's son, and the chief ordered the man to speak truly and not be afraid. The case was heard amid the most deathly silence. In awarding a heavy penalty of compensation against his son, the chief spoke of the central position of law in Ngoni life, and of the fact, so sharply brought out by the case, that the law was no respecter of persons.

Young adults, boys and girls, were held personally responsible for breaches of the law which they had commited. Penalties were awarded against them as individuals, even though they often could not pay the compensation without the help of their father and his family. They were expected to become acquainted with the law in various ways. One was by conformity to accepted social codes of behaviour, instilled into them by their elders, particularly in such matters as sex relations, respect for property, avoidance of slander and of injury by violence. Another way of learning how the law operated, as well as the principles upon which the case-law was built, was by attending the courts, and listening carefully to the cross-examinations as well as to the judgements. Young people were expected also to ask their fathers, and elders generally, about points of law which they had not understood, or had confused with some of the practices of the local people. The onus was upon young adults for acquiring this knowledge of the law as well as for behaving in accordance with it. We shall see in the next chapter how the Ngoni regarded being law-abiding as one of their basic cultural traits, as well as being evidence of the individual character of a young adult.

Ngoni traditional skills

We made a distinction, albeit a rather tentative one, at the beginning of this chapter between certain kinds of traditional knowledge which we have been describing up to this

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and demonstration of the group values. The first two, physical and moral strength, and working hard and persistently at allotted tasks, were, as we have seen, instilled into children from the stage of second teeth onward. The second two, dignity and wisdom, were to a large extent values implicit in adult life, and in the case of wisdom seen specially in the contribution made by senior men and women to community life. Dignity, however, had an ambivalent meaning, as did dominance among the group values. It covered not only language, deportment, self-control, accepted rank and precedence within the hierarchy on all social occasions, but the more subtle and very typical Ngoni attitude towards 'losing face'. In the sense that young adults and even older children hated being rebuked in public because it made them lose face, it belonged to younger people as well as to older, to those called the 'humble ones' as well as to the 'great ones'.

All the emphases in child training on language, deportment, self-control, manners and inter-personal behaviour of all kinds were related to the value of human dignity, and to the concept of a person's 'human nature' as being something to be respected and built up, and carefully guarded, since it was very vulnerable.

At the end of Chapter II when some Ngoni values were mentioned, wisdom was contrasted with cleverness, and equated with knowledge, good judgement, ability to control others and keep the peace, and skill in the use of speech. The young Ngoni headmaster in the first village described in Chapter I said reflectively one evening, after listening to some of the elders talking with me about Ngoni values, 'Yes, we are different in our generation. We are proud, but they had wisdom.' It was an acknowledgement of the pretensions which his generation had begun to claim as a result of the new knowledge in the schools. It was also a recognition that the accumulated wisdom of the generations of his father and grandfather had in it an understanding of values which the younger generation had not yet acquired.

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
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As we saw in Chapter VII ignorance of the law was no excuse for breaking the law, and the positive virtue of being law-abiding was constantly emphasized in families, villages and in the kingdom generally. Inherent in showing respect and being obedient and law-abiding was the much stressed quality of self-control. Early travellers remarked on the restrained, dignified and courteous behaviour in Ngoni villages, which was my experience also, and especially in the vicinity of leading Ngoni families. This kind of self-control was taught as we have seen in a great variety of contexts, from avoiding greedy and noisy eating as young children to putting up with being ordered about in the boys' dormitory, and from the insistence on the decorous forms of greeting and thanks to the suppression of any overt fear or pain at the puberty ceremonies.

Two other qualities were emphasized in child training since they were expected of all Ngoni people in inter-personal relations. One was generosity in sharing anything that a person had. It was a quality demanded of everyone, from the small child who was made to unclench his fist in which he was hiding three ground-nuts and give two of them to his fellows, to the big chief whose duty at a feast was to see that everyone had enough and to send food from his own portion to anyone who looked hungry. A number of proverbs called attention to the value of generosity and to the social attitude towards meanness, which was felt to be despicable. 'If you do not play with other people the grass will grow round your hut' implied that isolation and social ostracism would be the retaliation to a mean man. The reciprocal element in generosity was always implicit in the teaching and the practice and was illustrated in the proverb, often said hopefully by visitors when hospitality was not very readily forthcoming: 'I have sent my food basket to someone; the basket will return to me.'

The other quality was the conventional display of sympathy, especially at times of mourning for the dead, but also on occasions of severe loss, such as cattle dying, or illness or

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

action of the hoe. 'They are our kin according to their eyes' was said as a reminder of misplaced trust in those who appeared to be helpful but were not really.

Readiness to take advice both from their age-mates and from older men was another quality held to be desirable in young men. Proverbs illustrating this were: 'He that refuses instruction will be surprised by blood,' and 'He remembers that he fell; he forgot that he was hurt.' As often with proverbs, there were others with a contrary emphasis which were sometimes used as a retort to the former ones, or in self-defence. 'The inheritance was eaten by those worthy of it' was intended as a rejoinder not to interfere in other people's affairs, when unwanted advice was offered. 'The body is felt by its owner' was sometimes said to encourage a man to stick to his own opinion. On the other hand a too abrupt rejoinder, especially to an older person, was regarded as discourteous, and onlookers said 'You cause the spittle to be dry' to express extreme disapproval.

Ngoni personality in a changing culture

The direction of the training of boys had been formerly towards military life, and towards the qualities which made effective fighting men, and emphasized loyalty to leaders and camaraderie in the regiments. This emphasis on military preparedness was however never the sole emphasis in Ngoni training, and hence when warfare came to an end, there remained traditional spheres of influence and activity which were an integral part of life in the Ngoni kingdoms, as well as new spheres of activity opened up by missions, the administration, the trading companies and the labour recruiters.

The traditional forms of activity were found in Ngoni local government which included the chief's administration and the courts of law; family and village affairs including the building up of herds and buying and selling cattle; and ritual life. The new kinds of activity included occupations such as teacher, minister, clerk, store assistant, houseboy,

4: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1951 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

585 bride herself refuses to sit on the mat until she has been given a present. She is joined on the mat by a small girl, aged about ten, from the groom's family, who becomes known as 'the guide'.[1] The leader of the bride's party and one other of the bride's women sit down on the mat, with the bride and the guide between them.

The instruction of the bride now begins, with a speech from some [237] important man in the village, who takes the gall bladder and anoints the head, arms and feet of the bride with the gall, going on to anoint the guide in the same way. They are then sometimes anointed with vaseline by a woman. One person after another, men and women, [867] now proceed to lecture the bride on how she should behave in the village, and each explains to her who he or she is in relation to her. The gall bladder is blown up and stuck in the hair of the bride, where she will keep it until she returns to her own village. Each person who delivers a speech of instruction gives a small present, a threepenny bit or beads, which they put into a plate on the mat at the bride's feet. This situation of formal instruction, often of an [R3] abusive nature, accompanied by presents, is a recurrent one in Ngoni ceremonial.[2]

[237] Sometimes the small intestine of the animal is placed round the shoulders of a younger sister of the bride who is a member of her party. This girl is then designated linked co-wife (*nshanzi*) of the bride. This is not always done, and when it is done it does not imply that the girl will later become the real linked co-wife of her elder sister. Although in the two ceremonies I saw this designation of a linked co-wife did not occur, in both a sister of the bride was one of the bridal party.

[262] At the end of the instruction, the bride and her party go back into their own hut, and the leader cooks the liver of the animal, and the blood and fat. This she divides between the two families, sending the portion of the bridegroom's family to their hut for them to eat there. The guide stays in the bride's hut. After they have rested, the bride, guide, and their companions leave the village, taking the meat with them back to the bride's village. Outside her village the party stop, and are met by more women from the bride's family. The guide demands a small present before she will enter the village, usually beads. Inside the village the bride's mother takes the gall bladder from her daughter's head and buries it in the byre. The guide stays in the village for a few days, and demands another small present before she will assist the bride's people with cooking. When a quantity of flour has been pounded for the bride, and some maize half-pounded for the guide, the bride and the guide return quietly to the bridegroom's village. The bride begins to live with her husband, and the guide resumes her normal

[1] *Mpelekezi*, from the verb *ku-pelekeza*, to accompany part of the way. Cf. Zulu *impelesi*, girl accompanying a bride to her wedding.

[2] See above, p. 77.